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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 001902

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [TU](#)

SUBJECT: TURKEY: CHP LEADERSHIP IN DENIAL, AGITATION FROM  
BELOW

REF: A. ANKARA 1901

[1](#)B. ANKARA 1899

Classified By: Acting Political Counselor Kelly Degnan for reasons 1.4  
(b,d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY AND COMMENT. Turkey's main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) is in deep denial and disarray after a lacklustre showing in the July 22 general election. CHP leadership is pointing the finger everywhere but at itself, going so far as to hint that the ruling Justice and Development Party's (AKP) stunning capture of 46.6 percent of the vote was due to mass lunacy. CHP's scapegoating and hand-wringing since the election has highlighted its sclerotic party leadership, out of touch with both the public and its own social democratic core. Party leader Deniz Baykal, a spry 70 year old, appears headed for a fight with party rivals determined to revitalize CHP -- the party of Ataturk -- and regain CHP's place as the leading party of the left. END SUMMARY AND COMMENT.

CHP Sowed the Seeds of its Own Defeat  
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[1](#)2. (C) After a disappointing showing of 20 percent in the July 22 election, CHP Chairman Deniz Baykal broke several days of silence to boast that his party had increased its support by 1,200,000 votes, or 1.5 percent, over 2002 election results. He made no mention of the fact that it did so in an alliance with the Democratic Left Party (DSP), whose candidates took 13 of CHP's 111 seats. CHP Vice Chairman Onur Oymen, who at least acknowledged defeat, drew attention to the chasm between CHP elites and the Turkish public when he stated that the election result could not be explained logically. CHP leaders have blamed the party's poor performance on the military for creating a sympathy vote (reftel A) for AKP and the collapse of the center-right, which they claim drove votes to AKP.

[1](#)3. (C) CHP's election slogan, "The people will win! The Republic will win!", provides the most concise explanation of its marginal gain. Having aligned itself with forces outside the political realm -- the military, the judiciary -- to squeeze AKP, and having portrayed itself as defender of a republic in peril, CHP is now left in the cold by a public fed up with scare-mongering and political interference.

Baykal's drift from social democracy to rightwing populism had real right-wing nationalists joking they could feel CHP bumping up against their left shoulders, but won over few new voters and alienated even party loyalists with nowhere "left" to go. When rightist, nationalist topics dominate politics, quipped one CHP member, far-right Nationalist Action Party (MHP) is simply better at working them than CHP. AKP managed to entice some social democrats with its more persuasive social programs, better resources and organization, and greater attention to the needs of real Turks.

14. (C) A former CHP parliamentarian who did not seek re-election described the issue of military and court interference as a dead-end dilemma for true leftists. As democrats, they should have opposed both the military's April 27 e-memorandum and the Constitutional Court's odd May 1 ruling that blocked the presidential election. Instead, these actions accorded with the tactical demands of CHP leadership, and opposing them was impossible.

Mutiny in the Offing?  
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15. (C) CHP's supporters hold autocratic leader Deniz Baykal accountable for a bungled opportunity to capitalize on the pro-secularism Republic Rallies and make the most of a merger on the left. Scuffles broke out in front of CHP headquarters on election night, as calls for Baykal's resignation rang out. Disappointed CHP members hung a 20' poster of erstwhile Baykal challenger Mustafa Sarigul (Istanbul's Sisli mayor) outside CHP headquarters in a call for fresh leadership. Baykal has declared he does not intend to resign and claims he has been urged not to by former president Suleyman Demirel and other key CHP members. Baykal rejected resignations

ANKARA 00001902 002 OF 002

submitted by all 19 members of CHP's Central Executive Board on July 25, saying they should continue their duties.

16. (C) Sarigul is feeling his oats in Ankara now; he and Hikmet Cetin have been named in the press as potential Baykal replacements. Rumors of an upcoming party convention are fueled by meetings of prominent disgruntled social democrats, including Sarigul, Cetin, Onur Kumbaracibasi, Adnan Keskin, Mehmet Mogultay, and Celal Dogan. CHP reportedly will establish two committees to analyze the party's election failure, which might lead to a good housecleaning at the top. Even if Baykal and his cronies refuse to resign, some suggest a new party could emerge from the election debacle with a renewed emphasis on democracy and center-left values.

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